The belongings mentioned in the letter of dowry undoubtedly added to the great personal fortune that Hernando de Soto had already amassed in the conquest of Central America and Peru, allowing him to finance the expedition he was planning.

The Capitulación of la Florida

On April 20, 1537, in Valladolid, the king signed the agreement that granted Hernando de Soto the right to conquer and settle Florida. Years earlier, the same privileges had been given first to Pánfilo de Narváez, and after that to Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón.

The document, preserved in the Archivo General de Indias, stipulated the various conditions that were to be met for the proper completion of the expedition. The capitulación begins by expressing the esteem and trust that the monarch placed in De Soto, who by his earlier campaigns had amply demonstrated his ability to perform tasks of this nature: "Inasmuch as you, Captain Hernando de Soto, have served us in the conquest, pacification, and settlement of the provinces of Nicaragua and Peru and of other parts of our Indies, and now with the desire to serve us further and to continue and increase our patrimony and Royal Crown, wanted to return to the aforementioned Indies of ours to conquer and populate the province of Río de las Palmas up to Florida and the provinces and new lands. . . . "

Hernando de Soto was given a series of titles, ranks, and honors that endowed him with extraordinary powers concentrated in a single person. The same was done in every stage of the conquest of America. Thus, he was made governor and captain general of the territory that began at the coast and ended two hundred leagues inland; the delimitation of this area was left to him, and he was to fulfill the offices of Alguacil Mayor and Adelantado of the territory.

The title of adelantado carried with it multiple responsibilities. At the military level, as captain of the troops, he was in charge of defending the territory and maintaining peace and order. At the judicial level, he was empowered to represent the king himself. Besides these offices, he was granted the governorship of Cuba, "since from there you could govern better and provide everything that is essential and important for said conquest and settlement."

Five hundred men were to accompany De Soto, with arms, horses, munitions, and other things necessary for the expedition; the colonization would

be carried out by giving the townspeople lands and lots, with the benefit of a tax exemption for the first ten years. They were still required, however, to pay the royal fifth of all the gold, silver, and other goods they found in those territories.

The dual purpose of the expedition (conquest and colonization) could be seen in the diverse makeup of the participants. Alongside experienced soldiers there traveled persons who had never left the Peninsula: there were representatives of the petty and medium nobilities and, most of all, laborers, "all of them young, for among them one could hardly be found who had gray hair, a thing very necessary for victory over the toils and difficulties that emerge in the new conquests," as Garcilaso wrote. With them came a small group of women who were to remain on the island of Cuba. Among these was Isabel de Bobadilla, the wife of the adelantado.

The makeup of the expedition matched, in general terms, the characteristics of any migratory movement: a marked predominance of male representatives—although in this case this was due to their mission of conquest—and a mass of young people, suited to the task at hand.

The capitulación also called for the presence of clergy, "for the instruction of the natives of that province in our holy catholic faith." We have already remarked that the sword of the conquistadors also served their religion. The adelantado would cover the cost of taking the clerics along, as well as pay for all the preparations and expenses of the expedition. The crown limited itself to granting the territories and titles, without ever risking money in the royal treasury. The document is clear in this respect: "all of it at your expense and mission, and neither we nor the monarchs that come after us shall be obliged to pay you or satisfy the expenses you may incur therein."

One must explain here that Hernando de Soto, along with so many other conquistadors, never expected to obtain financial aid from the king. All of them did, however, seek the legal recognition of their possessions and their heraldic confirmation:

> These titles and offices were published all over Spain, with much talk about the new enterprise that Hernando de Soto would undertake in going and subduing and winning great kingdoms and provinces for the Spanish crown; and since throughout it was said that the captain who would carry it out had been the conqueror of Peru, and that, not satisfied with the one hundred thousand ducats which he had brought over from there, he was spending them on this second conquest, all were amazed and considered it better and richer than the first: because of which from every part of Spain came many knights of very

illustrious lineage, many noblemen, many soldiers practiced in the military art, who in different parts of the world had served the Spanish crown, and many citizens and laborers; all of whom, with such good reports of the new conquest, and at the sight of so much silver and gold and precious gems that they saw being brought from the New World; leaving their land, parents, relatives, and friends, and selling their estates, they readied themselves and offered in person or by letter to go to this conquest, with the hope that was promised, that it was to be as rich or richer than the two previous ones of Mexico and Peru.

—The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega

To ensure that the capitulación would be honored, the king sent officials from his treasury to accompany the expedition. They were in charge of collecting the king's fifth. The capitulación, like those granted to other conquistadors, contained extensive instructions in this respect. Juan Gaytán, Juan de Añasco, and Luis Fernández de Biedma were to travel with Hernando de Soto as accountants in the service of His Majesty.

Extremadurans Who Accompanied De Soto

The preparations began once the capitulación was confirmed. News of this new expedition spread throughout the Peninsula, and the response exceeded all expectations; it was not for nothing that De Soto had arrived from America a rich man, and with an aura of fame and prestige around him. His confidence in the successful completion of the endeavor encouraged hundreds of people, all wanting to change their luck and become rich, to enlist; a better advertisement than the expedition's organizer could not have been found.

The participation of the Extremadurans was enormous. Several factors contributed to the massive enrollment: news of the marvels that the New World offered; the fact that Hernando de Soto was from Extremadura; the tradition of the Extremadurans—many from Extremadura had accompanied Balboa, Cortés, Pizarro, and other captains, becoming rich in a short time. Those were the attractions of America. On the other hand, Extremadura's poverty relative to the other regions under the Castillian crown resulted in a constant emigration of its population during the sixteenth century toward the continent discovered by Columbus.

Of the approximately 600 persons who made up the expedition, more

than half were natives or residents of Extremadura; specifically, there were 311 Extremadurans with De Soto, issuing from fifty-six towns. The passenger logs prepared by the House of Trade of Seville still preserve personal data for every one of them.

Regional differences can be observed in the enlistment figures, as the participation of the provinces, or even of certain sections, differed significantly. For example, the province now known as Badajoz contributed a greater contingent than that of Cáceres, and within the former, more departures were recorded from the southwestern section. Albuquerque and Barcarrota were, after Badajoz, the towns contributing the greatest number of persons. The ties between Badajoz and the conquistador have already been noted, so that its contribution is not unexpected. In addition, the fact that some of its citizens possessed the same last name as the adelantado is only natural; this coincidence could well imply that they were related in some way. By the same token, the meager participation by the inhabitants of Jerez de los Caballeros is surprising, given the many dealings that De Soto had with this town.

The Journey to Florida

Once the expedition assembled in Seville and the necessary permits were issued by the House of Trade, they traveled to San Lúcar de Barrameda. They embarked from this spot on April 6, 1538, a year after the capitulación was signed. The fleet under Hernando de Soto's command consisted of seven ships and three brigantines and was accompanied by twenty other ships that, after reaching Cuba, would head for their final destination, Vera Cruz. After stopping at La Gomera Island, the fleet arrived at Santiago de Cuba toward the end of May, and De Soto took over the governorship.

A year passed before the departure for the conquest of La Florida. Twice during this waiting period, De Soto sent Juan de Añasco, a seaman and cosmographer, in command of two brigantines to reconnoiter the ports and coves of Florida. This reconnaissance shows how De Soto's plan for the conquest was marked by exhaustive preparation, and how he attempted to leave nothing to chance or improvisation. In his exploration of the Florida coasts, Juan de Añasco captured four Indians who would later be used as guides and interpreters. The royal officers who accompanied the expedition reported this in a letter sent to the king, in which they inform him of the final preparations for the voyage: "He brought four as interpreters and they

are so intelligent that we already understand each other somehow and they afford high hopes for that land, so much that everyone is very cheerful and happy to go."

While he waited in Cuba for the best time to set out for Florida, De Soto reaffirmed with Hernán Ponce de León the pact they had signed before the conquest of Peru, in which they swore to be brothers as well as partners. During this time, the adelantado also prepared his last will and testament. Signed in the city of La Habana only five days before the expedition departed, this document reveals interesting aspects of the Extremaduran's life. In it he mentioned his children, all of them illegitimate, since they were conceived before his marriage (Isabel de Bobadilla bore him no heirs). They were María de Soto, who lived in Nicaragua, Andrés de Soto, referred to by the adelantado as "a boy said to be my son," and Leonor de Soto, whose mother was Leonor, the daughter of the last Great Inca, Huayna Capac.

In other matters, the document records his wish to be buried in the Church of San Miguel de los Caballeros. In the event of his death during the attempt to conquer Florida, he requested that his body be brought to that church. He desired that a chapel be built in this same church, to be paid for out of his estate. The chapel was to be erected under the title of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, who must have been the object of his devotion. He wished also to establish a chaplaincy, and he made several bequests intended for various relatives. In addition, his will contains a request in memory of his very close friend Francisco Compañón, who was dead by then.

Having completed all the details of the expedition, Hernando de Soto named his wife governor regent of Cuba during his absence. He left San Cristóbal de la Habana on May 18, 1539, bound for Florida, the land where, in the years before, hundreds of Spaniards had perished in the midst of the most dreadful misery.

Previous Attempts in Florida

Florida, the land called Bimini by the Indians, was the place where the Fountain of Eternal Youth was thought to be, one of so many myths born in the New World, such as those of the Country of the Amazons and of El Dorado. Before the sixteenth century, the geography of Florida had been unknown. It was discovered in 1512 by Juan Ponce de León, who named it La Florida, apparently because its fields were filled with flowers, and because he discovered it on an Easter Sunday (Domingo de Pascua Florida). La

Florida, to the Spanish, included all of the present-day Southeast of the United States. Ponce de León attempted to conquer it twice, in 1515 and 1521, but both occasions ended in failure.

A new attempt was made in 1526, led by Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón. Some time earlier, he had chartered three ships sent to enslave Indians to work in the mines of the Antilles. The success of that first slaving adventure encouraged him to ask the king for permission to proceed with the conquest. Unfortunately, his expedition never got very far inland, since Ayllón died on the coast. Hunger and struggles for power decimated his troops to the point that "out of six hundred men that Ayllón had brought into that land, no more than fifty-seven escaped."

In 1527, Pánfilo de Narváez left Spain with intentions of colonizing the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. After experiencing the devastating effects of a hurricane, he disembarked in Tampa Bay, in the same spot where De Soto would begin the conquest years later. The expedition of Narváez traveled through areas that De Soto would also explore later. Hunger, cold weather, and attacks by the Indians gradually destroyed them: only four survivors were left. After living with the Indians for several years, these men escaped and began a long journey, spanning the territory of what is now the United States from East to West. One of the survivors, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, wrote in his work *Naufragios* about the suffering and tribulations they experienced in their walk across the continent.

These were the attempts to conquer Florida, considered one of the most inhospitable territories in the American continent. All of them had failed. Far from intimidating De Soto, however, they encouraged him to embark on an uncertain and dangerous adventure.

The Chroniclers of the Journey

The early stages of the conquest of America are well known to us, thanks to the many chronicles that survive today. In most cases, these testimonies were written by persons who participated directly in the events they related.

These soldier-chroniclers, in their desires to write memoirs of all that they witnessed, have left us valuable materials essential to our understanding of the different chapters of the Spanish conquest. They distinguished themselves by the quality of their works and by the attention to detail of their narratives. They not only preserved the most important events but also included geographic accounts of the areas they crossed and precise descrip-

tions of their inhabitants. Likewise, there are reports written by the crown officials who accompanied each expedition; their chief function was to inform the king of the circumstances in which the conquest unfolded.

De Soto's expedition to Florida included several of these chroniclers. One of them was the Hidalgo de Elvas, an unknown writer who came originally from the city of Elvas in Portugal. Others accompanying De Soto were Alonso de Carmona, Juan de Coles (another Extremaduran), and Luis Fernández de Biedma, who was one of His Majesty's officials. The Hidalgo de Elvas published his chronicle in 1557, and it is the most complete of all those written about Florida. The works by Carmona and Coles, on the other hand, appear to be short narratives that survive only in quotations included in the account by Garcilaso de la Vega. They are, however, also of undeniable interest. Finally, the account prepared by Biedma is quite complete and detailed. The writing reflects its author's position, since he traveled with the expedition as a royal official whose account constituted a report to the king.

There is another important chronicle of Hernando de Soto's endeavor in Florida; its author, the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, did not participate personally in the expedition, but his sources are apparently the works by Carmona and Coles, as well as an anonymous author [presumed to be Captain Gonzalo Silvestre] who, like them, took part in the expedition. The Inca published his work in 1605, half a century after the events that he wrote about.

Writers with such varied backgrounds naturally interpreted the events in different ways, and this of course makes their chronicles differ in certain details. Some of these can be disregarded, but others are quite noticeable and significant. There is a veritable mêlée of dates and figures, and it is difficult to unscramble the discrepancies. Some of the chroniclers even omit events of unquestionable interest.

In light of this, whenever we are faced with contradictions of this nature, we follow here the account by the Hidalgo de Elvas. As we have already mentioned, it is the most exhaustive, and it was written by a direct witness. Quotations not otherwise attributed, come from Elvas.

The Many Faces of Florida

The chroniclers served as genuine ethnographers who described the land and its inhabitants, the customs, rituals, and prevailing ways of life.

The encounter with this inhospitable and alien land shocked the Span-

iards, but their presence caused an even greater impact upon the indigenous population.

Charleton W. Tebeau estimates that at the beginning of the sixteenth century there were twenty-five thousand inhabitants in what later became Spanish Florida. This population was distributed throughout the territory as follows: around four thousand Calusa Indians (including such peoples as the Mayaimi, Ais, Jeaga, and Tequesta) occupied the southern part of the peninsula up to Tampa Bay; the Timucans, numbering slightly over fourteen thousand, lived scattered between Cape Canaveral, the Aucilla River to the west, and what is now Georgia to the north; finally, the Apalachees (together with their tributary peoples), estimated at sixty-eight hundred, settled between the Aucilla and the Ocklockonee rivers. These Indians had not yet discovered writing and were at a cultural level similar to that of the Neolithic. Aside from this, however, each group was quite different from the others: the Calusas, for example, isolated in the southern part of the peninsula, were not as advanced in relation to other cultures that settled more to the north.

The fertility of the soil was not uniform throughout the territory. The land toward the north, with its rich earth, was well suited for farming, whereas the southern terrain was poor, sterile, and marshy. Because of this, even though all these groups were hunters and gatherers, only the Timucans and the Apalachee practiced agriculture. They did this by burning the vegetation, opening clearings where they could plant beans, squash, and, above all, maize. The Hidalgo de Elvas describes the rooms where these products were stored: "They have barbacoas in which they keep their maize, which is a house built on high, on top of four sticks, made with boards like a loft and with reeds on the floor."

The tribes living near the coast included seafood in their diet to add variety to it. They deposited the shells, gathering them in heaps.

Florida's inhabitants lived in small settlements for long periods of time, and sometimes permanently. The dwellings were round in shape, and the materials used in their construction were diverse and showed how well they had adapted to the environment. Houses were built using wood, clay, palm leaves, weeds, and straw. Each town had a public house that served both as a meeting place and for holding ceremonies. The most characteristic structure that the Floridian Indians built was the mound, which was of two types: some mounds became the residence of the *cacique,* while others were set aside as burial places. The bodies of the dead were left there, open to the air, until only the bones remained, and these were later buried in cemeteries.

Besides the mounds, they also built sepulchral houses, called *mezquitas* by the Spaniards.

Their social system was based on the clan, a unit determined by blood ties. The tribe was composed of different clans and, headed by the cacique, constituted an independent sociopolitical unit, although there could be a higher entity that could unite several tribes under its authority. The office of cacique was hereditary and could be held by a woman. The cacique was entitled to collect taxes from the people; he presided over the meetings and decided the time for sowing, hunting, and gathering. Nevertheless, despite the many powers that fell to him, his authority was not absolute, and he had to seek the opinion of prominent members of the Indian community, who formed a kind of privileged caste within their society. The lowest layer of the social scale was formed by slaves captured in battles against other tribes, who were then employed in agricultural labor and similar tasks. Garcilaso, referring to these captives, remarks that "the nerves or tendons of their feet" were cut "to prevent their escape."

The Floridians worshiped the sun and the moon, and they venerated animals such as deer, serpents, and small reptiles or insects. They believed in a life after death, which they thought would be similar to the one they had led on earth. Occasionally they would offer human sacrifices to the sun. On these occasions, children and captives were the propitiatory victims for preventing calamities and obtaining divine favors.

Polygamy was permitted, although it was mainly practiced by caciques and the nobility. Adultery was severely condemned in women. Garcilaso tells us: "She was obligated to be most faithful to her husband, under penalty of the laws that they had established for the punishment of adultery, which in certain provinces ordained a cruel death and in others a very ignominious punishment."

This was, broadly speaking, the land that cost Hernando de Soto his life. His search for a new Incario was fruitless—the cultural development and degree of evolution of the Floridian Indians were centuries behind those of the Incas.

The Beginning of the Adventure

On May 30, 1539, the expedition disembarked at Tampa Bay, which they called Puerto del Espíritu Santo. De Soto, with his army of six hundred,

took possession of the land in the name of Emperor Charles V, a formality that was repeated in every expedition made to the New World.

The first town they come upon was Ucita, where they found Juan de Ortiz, a Sevillan who had survived the expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez. Held by the Indians for twelve years, and undergoing enormous tribulations, he had managed to survive until the Spaniards freed him from his lengthy captivity. After the joy occasioned by this encounter, preparations began for the entry inland. De Soto sent the ships back to Cuba under orders to return with provisions at a later time. A group of men stayed behind on the coast, while the main body of the expedition penetrated inland, heading for the province of Paracoxis. De Soto had previously sent a group of men ahead of him to reconnoiter. These scouting missions were carried out throughout the campaign; their information was vital, since it prevented unpleasant surprises and saved them unnecessary marching. Similarly, the Indians who joined the expedition as guides and interpreters (*lenguas*) offered invaluable help, although their work was made difficult by the extent of the territory they covered, in addition to the fact that Florida had many faces to show them. As we have already mentioned, its tribes were very different from one another, each speaking a distinct dialect.

Advancing from Paracoxis, they reconnoitered new territory throughout the summer. They found, however, that the different settlements they crossed could barely support the Indians who lived in them, much less feed De Soto's troops. His men began to feel the ravages of hunger. The expedition was off to a difficult start, and far from improving, these conditions would only worsen during four interminable years, as the Hidalgo de Elvas relates: "[The troops] were badly beset by hunger and the bad terrain, as the land was very poor in maize, low and full of water, lakes, and thick bushes, and the provisions they had brought from the port had been exhausted."

The Portuguese chronicler attests to the difficulties of the journey: the dense vegetation and swamplands that composed the landscape made the progress of the troops slow and laborious, especially for the cavalry.

To the problems of topography were added the warlike nature of the tribes they encountered. De Soto's armies began to suffer casualties in skirmishes with the natives. The chroniclers have left us a long list of the Indian names of the towns and regions they crossed: Cale, Ytara, Cholupa, Napetaca. . . .

Hoping to find riches and precious metals there, the expedition headed north for the Apalachee region, where they found instead only the remains of the failed expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez. At this point, they had covered 110 leagues (some 450 km) since disembarking in Tampa Bay. The near-

ness of the sea and the good terrain prompted them to spend the winter in Apalachee: "There were great quantities of maize, squash and beans and dried plums of the earth, which are better than those of Spain and grow in the fields without anyone planting them . . . , the provision was collected which seemed that it would suffice to spend the winter."

During the stay in Apalachee, De Soto ordered the men who had stayed behind in the port of Espíritu Santo to come and join them; he also sent several brigantines to La Habana in order to inform the *gobernadora* of the progress of the conquest, and to bring back new supplies and provisions when they returned. We know, with the benefit of hindsight, that even though Francisco Maldonado, who was in charge of the voyage, returned several times, he could never contact De Soto or his expedition. At the end of March 1540, the adelantado broke winter camp at Apalachee and headed north toward Cofitachequi. It was there that they hoped to find the long-awaited riches, encouraged by statements made by the Indians. Again the going became difficult. They constantly encountered rivers that slowed their progress; in some cases it took them more than two days to ford them, and several Spaniards drowned during the crossings. Along the way, interpreters were not lacking to steer them incorrectly, and hunger and disease became chronic companions: "If a man fell sick there was nothing to help him get better and with a sickness that could have been easily remedied elsewhere he walked, spent, until he had not a well bone in him. And they died of sheer weakness, some of them saying: if I had a slice of meat or a few rocks of salt, I would not now be dying."

On the way to Cofitachequi they crossed a poor and unpopulated region. The scarcity of food was aggravated to the point that De Soto "began to distribute rations out of some swine we had brought," the Hidalgo de Elvas tells us. Each "Christian" received one pound of meat, which, "cooked in water with no salt," alleviated the emptiness of the Castillian stomachs for a while. It is strange to see how these men could want for food while marching beside an entire herd of swine that at one point contained hundreds of head. Nevertheless, these animals were not to serve as provisions for the troops, but rather as an important part of the colonization effort. Hernando de Soto's mission was not only to conquer, but also to populate the territories. Both phases of his mission were considered essential, and in the second—the colonization—the preservation of the swine played a significant role.

At this stage of the journey the number of members of the expedition had increased enormously with the addition of Indian guides, interpreters, and *tamemes* (those employed in carrying the cargo) from the villages they

passed. The time came when there were more of these Indians than there were Spaniards. When the need for food became extreme, De Soto had to let many of them go, because "he did not have anything with which to feed them."

The Second Year in Florida

They arrived in April at Cofitachequi, where they found remains of the unsuccessful expedition led by Lucas de Ayllón. De Soto's army rested easily here. Located near a river, very close to the sea, its cacique was a woman, who received them with great splendor. The chroniclers agree in describing the good impression that these people made on them, both physically and culturally. The Spaniards admired the dresses, the cloaks made with colorful feathers, the good workmanship in leather and pearls that, even though they were perforated, could fetch a great price. Many of them, tired and disillusioned after wandering through wild and inhospitable territories without finding the promised wealth, began to view this land as appropriate for settlement. Their reasoning was solid: Cofitachequi was situated near the Atlantic Ocean, making it possible as a waypoint for ships traveling from New Spain, Peru, and the mainland on their way back to the Peninsula [Spain and Portugal]. Besides, the fertility of its fields ensured that everyone could be fed. Nevertheless, Hernando de Soto did not give up his determination to find a treasure like Atahualpa's, which had yielded such spectacular dividends. He was firm in his resolve, "and because he was a hard man and curt in his words, although he was glad to listen and to know everyone's opinion, after stating his own he did not want to be contradicted and he always did as he saw fit."

These were the first signs of division or disagreement among the Spaniards. The adelantado's authority and strict character drove them on in search of the long-awaited precious metals. They crossed the river where Cofitachequi was situated (which they called Espíritu Santo), heading northwest. In a few days the panorama again turned desolate. Along the way they found only scattered villages and impoverished lands, incapable of feeding the members of the expedition and their horses.

Advancing through rough terrain that obstructed their progress, they reached the river's source, arriving at Guaxule. This was as far north as they would ever go into what is now the United States. The three hundred dogs they were given there alleviated their near-continuous hunger. The enclosed

towns and peaceful Indians of this region allowed them to regain their strength; "the horses arrived there so thin that in their weakness they could not carry their owners."

Throughout the entire journey, the adelantado constantly interrogated the natives about the existence of a land possessing great riches. The replies he received were always in the affirmative, and he was invariably shown in which direction to set out, somewhere far from the homes of those being interrogated. We may be certain that these answers concealed the desire of the Indians to be rid of him and his people; it is impossible to ignore the upheaval that this expedition caused in the settlements they crossed, or in the abuses they committed. De Soto's men were tired, hungry, and ever more discouraged. Food and women were requisitioned without any scruples.

The caciques were not always obliging when faced with the adelantado's demands, and this led to trouble. This happened in Tascaluça, for example. According to Fernández de Biedma, when the cacique, "an Indian so tall that everyone considered him a giant," was required to provide Indians for carrying the cargo, he answered "that he was not wont to serve anyone, rather, that everyone served him." In other places, De Soto had to resort to his diplomatic talents: in Acoste, he pretended to rebuke his own Spaniards for their vandalism in order to avoid being attacked by the Indians.

In the fall of 1540, while headed south toward the Bay of Mobile, they suffered the fiercest attack since their arrival in Florida at a town called Mauvilla: "The Indians fought with such energy that they returned many times to expel our men. The battle lasted so long that, tired and very thirsty, many of the Christians went to drink from a lake near the fence and returned to fight, and it was dyed with the blood of the dead."

The battle was tremendously bloody. On the Spanish side, according to Biedma, more than twenty men died and the wounded neared two hundred and fifty. A great number of horses were lost as well. Among the Indians the casualties must have been greater, given the superior weapons that De Soto's men carried. However, the figures quoted by the chroniclers are excessive and exaggerated; the twenty-five hundred enemy deaths they report surely betray their bias. The writers tried to emphasize the valor of the Castillian troops, although they also praised the daring of the Indians, who "fought like fierce lions."

In Mauvilla they stopped for a month so that the wounded could heal. There they heard that the sea was not far off, and entertained the hope that Maldonado had returned from Cuba and was waiting for them with provisions. In spite of this, Hernando de Soto decided to set out northward. The

chroniclers disagree as to the reason for this decision. The king's official, Biedma, states that, as it was the month of November and the weather was quite cold, the governor thought it best to go and look for some new spot where they could find enough provisions to spend the winter. On the other hand, the Hidalgo de Elvas remarks that De Soto feared that news of his fruitless search, of not having yet found gold or silver, would reach Cuba. This news would give Florida a bad name, and no one would wish to go there; he therefore chose to continue searching before informing anyone of his situation.

This last version seems more probable if we consider the adelantado's resolve to succeed in his expedition at any cost. Besides, he knew his people's state of mind. He was aware that if they reached the coast, he risked a mass desertion.

The army crossed into present-day Mississippi and decided to spend their second winter at Chicaça, a small town of "no more than twenty houses." We can easily imagine the suffering of those undernourished, weakened men, tired by the constant marches, ravaged by the cold, and many of them wounded in the last encounter. The few buildings in the town were not enough to shelter all of them, and in spite of the fires they built, "they spent all night turning and tossing, without sleeping, because if they warmed themselves on one side, they froze on another."

The relations with the natives seemed to be peaceful. The Indians became so fond of pork meat "that each night the Indians came to some houses . . . where the pigs slept and they killed and took all the pigs they could."

Toward the end of the winter, however, the Spaniards were unexpectedly attacked by the Indians, who set fire to the already-battered winter quarters. Eleven Spaniards, fifty horses, and several hundred pigs perished during the fray. The material losses were irreparable, because "if by chance any of them had any clothing left from the war of Mauvilla, there they lost it in the fire." In addition to the wretched conditions they were already in, they were now faced with having to march half-naked. The Spaniards lost practically all of their supplies and most of their equipment in the fire resulting from the surprise attack on the town.

Elvas describes the battle in these words:

> The Indians came to the sleeping quarters, in four squadrons, each squadron separate from the rest. And when their presence was discovered they sounded a drum and attacked with great cries and with such speed that they arrived together with the night watch, who had been away from the camp. And

when they were found by those inside the town, half of their things were burning from the fire they set.

. . . And outside, behind the doors, they awaited the Christians, who left the houses with no time to arm themselves. And as they got up confused from their sleep, and the smoke and fire blinded them, they did not know where they were going, nor could they hit their target with the weapons, nor could they saddle their horses, nor could they see the Indians who threw them down. Many of the horses were burned in the stable, and those that could break their halters freed themselves.

The confusion and disorder were such that everyone fled wherever he could, without there being anyone to resist the Indians.

The Discovery of the Mississippi

In March of 1541, they continued their search for riches, having abandoned Chicaça. The attacks by the Indians came one after another, unceasingly, and only on a few occasions were they received peacefully by the natives. The chroniclers described the many bloody battles, which often followed the same pattern. The element of surprise and the lack of knowledge about their surroundings worked against the Spaniards, who continually suffered casualties. The Indians were a menacing sight in the eyes of the members of the expedition: their bodies, legs, and arms painted different colors, they were covered with tufts of feathers and wore horns on their heads; their faces were blackened and their eyes "bordered with red in order to look fiercer."

Weakened by the sheer number of trials, the morale of the Castillians gradually crumbled beyond repair. Their hopes of finding wealth disappeared, and in their place the shadow of death emerged. Yet even in spite of this, they remained faithful to the adelantado, who still clung firmly to his belief that he would find an Incario in Florida.

In June, the expedition arrived at the shores of the Mississippi, which they called the Río Grande because of its width and volume. De Soto and his men were the first Europeans to see it, and the surprise they felt was justified: "The river was around half a league wide, if a man stood motionless on the other side, one could not descry whether he be a man or something else. Its depth was great and its current very strong; the water was always muddy; in it many trees and pieces of wood floated down river, carried by the force of the waters and the current."

In time, the Indian name Meaot Massipi ("Father of the Waters") came to be used. It took the army a month to build canoes to cross the river.

Advancing westward through the swamps and lakes of the Mississippi basin, they reached the plains, where they marveled at the movable dwellings (*tipi*) used mostly by the Sioux and Comanches, who could quickly dismantle their semipermanent villages. They found empty settlements, abandoned by their inhabitants out of fear of the foreigners. In other places, however, the natives received them as demigods, convinced that they were the children of the sun. The cacique of Casqui, for example, asked De Soto to cure certain blind Indians and restore their eyesight, appealing to his divine powers. On occasion, De Soto described himself as a child of the sun. While this strategy was intended to intimidate the Indians, it did not always give the desired results. The cacique of Guayocha, a town on the shores of the Río Grande, put the adelantado's divinity to the test, by asking him to dry up the Mississippi. Only if he did this, he told De Soto mockingly, would he be convinced that he was indeed a child of the sun.

These two episodes show, once more, the Spaniards' precarious situation. They could not impose their authority effectively on the Indians. Biedma tells us,

> . . . We came to another province . . . called Ycasqui, this peaceful cacique came out to us, telling us that he had heard of us for a long time and that we were men from heaven, and that their arrows could not harm us and because of that they did not want to go to war against us, but to serve us. They were well received by the governor, and he did not want anyone to enter their town so that no harm would be done to it. . . . The cacique asked the governor . . . to leave them a sign to which he could come to ask for help in their wars and which his people could ask for water for their crops, which had great need of it, since their children were starving. The governor had a very tall cross made from two pine trees, and told him to come another day, and he would give him the sign from heaven, and he should believe that he would want for nothing if he placed a true hope in it. . . . We went in a procession to the town. . . . We erected that cross and we went with great devotion, going on our knees to kiss the cross in the town, the Indians did as they saw us do, no more and no less.

In their travels they came near Coligua, where they obtained salt from a lake filled with warm, briny water. This compound was vital for their survival, and they had not tasted it for several months. Coligua's inhabitants had not heard of the Spaniards, but when "they were in sight of the town . . . they fled." The Hidalgo de Elvas named this area Caya, since a river that

ran through it reminded him of "the brook that runs through Extremadura." Here they were informed that to the west the inhabitants were few and widely scattered. On the other hand, to the southeast they would find large towns. De Soto decided to follow this route, intending at least to reach the sea and inform Cuba of the progress and whereabouts of the expedition. Although the governor was aware of their failure up to that point, he was not discouraged by it. In spite of the enormous effort they had invested, seemingly to no avail, he still hoped to rebuild his estate, to "turn and attack and discover, further ahead, toward the west." It was December 1542, and winter had overtaken them. They had lost half of their men, and more than a hundred and fifty horses. During their third winter in Florida, "it was so cold and there was so much snow," remarks Biedma, "that we thought we would die."

Death of the Adelantado Hernando de Soto

At the end of the third winter they advanced toward the southeast in search of the coast. Juan Ortiz—the man who had survived Narváez's expedition and had offered them invaluable services as an interpreter—died on the way. They again reached the Mississippi and stopped at Guayocha, the place where the cacique had tested De Soto. The governor sent out a party to look for the sea, and they returned, reporting enormous obstacles that had to be overcome: swamps, very dense vegetation, marshes, "which was received with great sorrow by the Governor when he saw the bad course of action he had for reaching the sea, and a worse one for surviving unaided on land, as his people and horses were diminishing, and with those thoughts he fell ill."

De Soto contracted what was probably typhoid fever, then called *tabardillo*, which killed him a few days later. He died filled "with sorrow for leaving them in such confusion, for that was what he was doing in leaving them in a land where they did not know where they were." It was June 25, 1542. Before his death, he made a new will, whose whereabouts is not known. He named his lieutenant—Luis de Moscoso, born in the town of Zafra—chief of the expedition. His death was deeply felt and greatly mourned by many, although, according to the Hidalgo, some were glad because with it came their liberation. Now they could return and leave behind the struggles, suffering, and poverty that had loomed over them ever since they set foot on that soil.

He was buried in secret, and his death was kept from the Indians. They

noticed his absence and asked for him, and they were told "that he had gone to heaven, as he had often done in the past." However, they must not have been satisfied with this answer, because the Spaniards were still afraid that their captain's body would be desecrated. They disinterred it secretly and put it in the Mississippi, whose waters became a resting place for the intrepid Extremaduran.

The new captain, according to a custom of that time, sold the adelantado's belongings to his men: two male slaves, two female slaves, three horses, and 700 pigs. The buyers promised to pay whenever a distribution of riches were made. Obviously, Hernando de Soto's personal fortune was not limited to these possessions. Although in the journey to Florida he had invested an exorbitant amount of money, the failure of that enterprise would not have ruined him. Isabel de Bobadilla, having received news of her husband's death, made an inventory of the household goods, land, and livestock belonging to her husband. In a document dated December 6, 1543 in the city of San Cristóbal de la Habana, she listed all the possessions for which she had proof of ownership. She was aware that the inventory did not include property and goods that the adelantado had in the Kingdom of Castille and in other kingdoms of the crown. The lengthy enumeration includes a house and other outbuildings, land, slaves, livestock (horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and fowl), farming implements, furnishings, wardrobes, dresses and implements for household duties, gold and silver jewelry—in short, the inventory lets us glimpse the enormous fortune that Hernando de Soto's sword earned him in the different expeditions in which he participated.

> The death of the governor, Captain General Hernando de Soto, so worthy of lamentation, caused great sorrow and sadness among all his own. . . . Their sorrow and pain were doubled when they saw that they were forced to bury him in silence and in secret, which was not done in public so that the Indians would not know where it lay, because they feared they would do to his body certain ignominies and affronts they had done to other Spaniards. . . . Because of which they decided to bury him at night, with standing guards so that the Indians would not see or know where he was being left. . . . The next day, to hide the spot where the body lay and to conceal their sadness, they made it known to the Indians that the governor was in better health . . . , but as pleasure can only be badly feigned and grief cannot be hidden . . . , our men could not do so much that the Indians did not thus suspect the governor's death and the place where they had laid him. . . .
>
> As the Spaniards saw and noticed these signs . . . they thought it would be best to lay him to rest in the Río Grande. . . . They cut down a very thick

holm oak and at about half the height of a man they hollowed it out on one side where they could place the body, and the next night, with the greatest silence possible, they disintered him and placed him in the oak's trunk with boards nailed to embrace the body on the other side, and so he was left, as if in an ark, and with the many tears and sorrow of the priests and knights that were present in this second burial, they placed him in the middle of the river's current, committing his soul to God and they saw him then fall to the bottom.

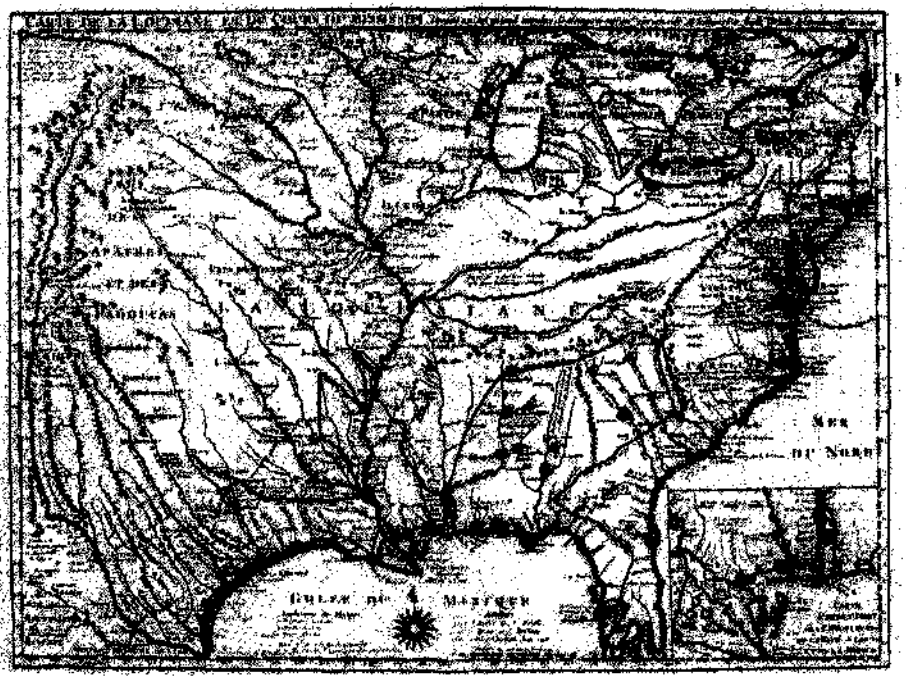
—The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega

The End of the Expedition

The main instigator and promoter of the expedition was dead. The number of soldiers had been reduced to less than half of the initial army, with virtually no horses remaining. Their hopes of finding the treasures and riches promised at the start of the journey had vanished. The majority of the Spaniards expressed their desire to renounce the conquest of Florida. Exhaustion and discouragement had reached their peak, and the death of the governor eliminated the last obstacle to the fulfillment of the thought in the minds and spirits of almost everyone: to return.

Two alternatives were considered. One was to go westward to New Spain [Mexico], attempting to repeat the journey that Núñez Cabeza de Vaca carried out years earlier; the other was to build ships and sail down the river to the sea. The better option seemed to be to set out across country for New Spain, since the descent of the Mississippi was risky—they had no one that could serve as mate or pilot, and they had no charts for navigation. Besides, on the journey by land it was still possible that they might find some treasure that could compensate for the sorrows they had encountered in that "accursed" place. So they started overland, but they again encountered the problems that had haunted them in their passage across most of Florida: difficult terrain, attacks by Indians, impoverished territories, hunger—all this, added to the fact that they did not know which route to follow or the true distance between them and New Spain, made them retrace their steps after having covered a good distance.

Back on the shores of the Mississippi, in Aminoya, they were forced to spend another winter. Building the seven brigantines that would carry them downriver took months. When this task was finished, they proceeded to kill the remaining horses (except for twenty-five of them) and the pigs that were left, since it was impossible to bring them aboard. For this same reason they



Delisle's Map of Louisiane, 1718. Guillaume Delisle was a prominent European mapmaker in the eighteenth century, and this map is remarkable for its careful depiction of the French settlements in the new colony of "Louisiane." The map is also noteworthy because it shows Delisle's attempt to reconstruct the route of De Soto's army through the region over 170 years before. His method was to match the names mentioned in the published chronicles to native tribes and locations extant in 1718, such as Apalache, Cheraqui (Chalaque), Conchaque (Coça) and Mobiliens (Mobila). (Courtesy of the Cornell University Library)

freed most of the Indians who had carried their cargo. This measure was inhumane in the opinion of the Hidalgo de Elvas, because many of these Indians were far from their own lands and were left at the mercy of other tribes. When they embarked, on July 2, 1543, the chronicler could not avoid describing the reaction of the unfortunate Indians who were not allowed on board the ships: "Most of them were left crying, which was very pitiful to behold, seeing that all those of good will had been Christians and would now be lost."

During their voyage downriver, they were continually attacked by the natives. They were unable to repel the attacks, since their firearms had been melted down and used in the construction of the ships.

After nineteen days, they reached the sea and decided to continue along the coast until they found New Spain. This was more feasible than crossing the gulf to reach Cuba, which would have been a risky adventure. Finally, on September 10, 1543, they sighted the mouth of the Pánuco River (in Tampico). Sailing into it, they noticed that there were Indians there, dressed in the manner of the Spaniards. The feelings of the members of the expedition on learning that these were indeed the shores of New Spain were captured by the masterly pen of the Hidalgo de Elvas: "The pleasure that everyone felt at this news cannot be entirely expressed, because it was as though at that moment they had been born."

The Spaniards, "dressed in deerskins that had been tanned and dyed black," had survived a hard journey "among infidels, without a single fortification where they could regain their strength, and without any other assistance." Hundreds of Castillians, including the man responsible for the enterprise, perished in the adventure they had begun four years earlier in Tampa Bay. Hernando de Soto died without realizing how wide was the gulf that separated the Peru of the Incas from the Florida he attempted to conquer.

So ended one of the most dramatic expeditions made by the Spaniards on American soil in the sixteenth century. Thousands of kilometers were explored in the southern part of the United States, covering the area now occupied by the states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. The expedition, although a failure from the standpoint of the conquest, brought about important geographic discoveries.